

Diplomatic Footprints

Author: Aizaz Ahmad Chaudry, Published by Sang-e-Meel Publishers, Lahore, 2021: Pp 615

Brig. (retd) Raashid Wali Janjua¹

An autobiography is not about pictures; it's about stories; it's about honesty and as much truth as you can tell without coming too close to other people's privacy.

(Boris Becker)

“Diplomatic Footprints” is an autobiography of Pakistan's eminent diplomat and public intellectual Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry. It personifies the essence of Boris Becker's wry catechism about autobiographies as honest forays into one's own privacy while sparing others. For readers, looking for light reading, the 615-page hardbound volume divided into eight main parts might appear intimidating at first but then appearances are deceptive. The book is not the standard fare throwing usual vignettes on one's actual and imagined achievements but a useful primer for the serious students of global politics, diplomacy, and security studies. It has a creative flow that inspires a rare empathy for a reader who at once feels as much as he thinks.

The book is a thinking man's chronicle of his life and achievements, recounted with verve and gravitas shining light on the writer's chosen avocation as well as personal achievements. The professional journey and personal achievement merge so well in a riveting narrative that takes the reader in its grip right from the start whetting his thirst for further nuggets of wisdom culled out of the author's experience as a fighter pilot trainee, a diplomat, and the doyen of think tank

¹ Reviewer is the Director Research at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Pakistan.

Brig. (retd) Raashid Wali Janjua

community. The biggest merit of the expansive discourse on his life and achievements is the self-restraint exercised while uncovering the hidden aspects germane to Pakistan's evolution as a state by avoiding sensationalism.

The lucidly written autobiography in limpid yet unpretentious prose seeks more to inform than excite. The narrative style shifts from discursive to analytical without burdening the mind of the readers with too many technicalities while discussing complex ideas as well as the diplomatic snafus. The greatest merit of the book, considering the depth and expanse of the subjects covered, is the circumspection exercised by the writer in steering away from sensationalism. A simple narrative and avoidance of the "scoop trap" is the hallmark of the book as the author consciously avoids stirring up needless controversies. It is a veritable raconteur's tale ringing bells yet avoiding noise. The ease and facility with which the author shines a light on some dark chapters of the country's history, including the 1971 War, the Kargil Conflict, Osama Bin Laden episode, the Salala crisis, and the Raymond Davis affair, invest the narrative with scholarly sobriety.

The tone and tenor of the discourse are candid and the analytical forays in foreign relations and the diplomatic minefields intrepid. Despite calling a spade a spade, the writer strikes a conciliatory chord even while evaluating the intractable Pakistan-India conflict and the concomitant diplomatic challenges. Though there are palpably patriotic overtones in his discourse, there is a rare element of realpolitik and pragmatic diplomacy in policy prescriptions about Pakistan's relations with its estranged neighbour. The author's positive attitude makes him believe that the moribund SAARC, the stalled peace process, and the desultory composite dialogue were not the opportunities lost but the potential available to usher in an era of peace and prosperity in South Asia.

As a votary of a comprehensive notion of security, he envisions geo-economics as the centerpiece of the subcontinent's future conflict resolution paradigm. The reliance on the geo-strategic strengths for diplomatic leverages with global powers, to earn economic rents, in his opinion, should give way to geo-economic-centric regional cooperation leading to sustained peace and development in the region. In Chapter 15, on the "Economics of Peace," he advocates trade and commerce between India and Pakistan, mentioning that the bilateral trade between Pakistan and India had increased from \$237 million in 2002-03 to \$1.67 billion in 2006-07, eventually rising to \$3.6 billion. Though it tilted in favour of India, the promise was tremendous especially if India had removed its non-tariff barriers. The author recounts a diplomatic lesson in the importance of "give and take" in negotiations for the budding peacemakers by quoting the example of an overzealous Pakistani bureaucrat of Commerce and Trade Group, who had almost torpedoed the trade talks due to a wrongly drafted joint statement.

On the question of Pakistan's identity and purpose, he is a proponent of Jinnah's vision of a country for Muslims where they could live their lives free of the tyranny of the majority, and in accordance with the democratic ideals. The early demise of Jinnah was a grievous blow from where onwards, according to him, Pakistan struggled to gain the desired equilibrium between the ideals of its founding fathers and the ambitions of the politico-bureaucratic elite. Consequently, the country was pushed to pell mell, hurtling down the road of political instability. According to the author, Jinnah's speech in the Constituent Assembly warning of the perils of bribery, and corruption and reminding the rulers of their main responsibilities i.e maintenance of law and good governance, should be the guiding beacon for all the governments. Ambassador Chaudry regrets that the political and economic history of the country had featured a callous disregard for the above principles.

Brig. (ret'd) Raashid Wali Janjua

His epilogue chapter is rich in reflective wisdom on a diverse array of topics. In these, he appears an incorrigible optimist who rues past mistakes yet hopes earnestly for the future. He dispels the notion of Pakistan's foreign policy being disproportionately influenced by the military and cites the example of the USA where other stakeholders have important inputs in the foreign policy. The present National Security Committee, according to the writer, was a sound vehicle for foreign and security policy decisions and could further be elevated to the status of a Council for a better fusion of foreign and security policies in an institutionalized manner. The much-touted independence of the foreign policy, according to him, is predicated upon the freedom from external dependence. Economic strength is the true guarantor of an independent foreign policy. On the Kashmir issue, he takes a realistic note by reminding the readers of the Indian intransigence in denying Kashmiris their rights. After the revocation of Article 370, and the annexation of IIOJK, any expectation of the Indian softening stance on Kashmir is a pipedream. He recommends a provisional province's status for Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) in keeping with the aspirations of the people of AJ&K and GB.

On another challenge of foreign policy i.e., nuclear weapons, he highlights the Indian doctrinal shift towards counter-force posturing and escalation dominance which coupled with its Ballistic Missile Defence systems, like S400 and Space Warfare capabilities, undermines the nuclear equilibrium in the subcontinent. While recounting the responsible Pakistani behavior during Pulwama crisis, when the Indian pilot was returned to defuse the tensions, the Indian bellicose rhetoric, and externalization of terrorism issue, is highlighted as a grave peril for the regional peace with global repercussions. The author further explains Pakistan's foreign and security policy challenges, which are largely pertaining to terrorism and Afghanistan. He presents a strong defence of Pakistan's stance on terrorism as a US ally citing inconsistencies in US policies in Afghanistan that inflicted problems on Pakistan. The author, however, debunks the managed chaos theories of cynics and believes

that the USA's intervention in Afghanistan was for countering terrorism by Al Qaeda and that Pakistan's support was still crucial for global efforts for lasting peace in Afghanistan.

A major foreign policy challenge for Pakistan, according to author, is the Sino-US rivalry and its impact on the South Asian peace dynamics. Pakistan's biggest challenge is to navigate a safe course between the two global powers. He cautions against annoying the USA where a million-plus Pakistani diaspora exists and which is still the destination of our major exports. The win-win formula of integrating the US private investors in China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), might act as a peace bridge dousing the fires of competitive politics in South Asia. For Pakistan's relations with the Muslim World, the writer recommends a conservative approach and avoidance of major departure from policies without preparing a public opinion at home and settling the Palestinian issue.

The author also believes that cultural and economic diplomacy, being important instruments of foreign policy, needs to be buttressed through the capacity building of our trade counselors and proactive engagement with the Pakistani diaspora as well as cultural experts. The Foreign Service and Commerce & Trade cadres need to be merged for better results. The proper strategizing and showcasing of our cultural and religious tourism could yield results disproportionate to the effort due to the inherent potential of the two. *Diplomatic Footprints* is a veritable treasure trove for both the serious students of diplomacy and the aficionados of good biographies. It is equally useful for the students who wish to fill up their knowledge gaps about diverse subjects such as UN politics, expansion of Security Council, nuclear disarmament, multilateral diplomacy and regional politics. One cannot find a better exposition of the middle powers' jockeying for the Security Council seats and the role of other centers of power, like the African Union, in scuttling that initiative. Similarly, one cannot find a better exposition of Pakistan-Iran relations, and the

Brig. (retd) Raashid Wali Janjua

evolution of ECO and Post-Soviet Union Central Asian politics than in this book.

The author reserves his best for the exposition of multilateral diplomacy, and the bilateral CBMs through a step-by-step approach. One marvels at his patience and perspicuity in picking up small details in these processes while quoting examples as of Pakistan-USA, Heart of Asia, and the Indo-Pakistan peace diplomacy. His recollection of the Sharif-Modi meeting, covering minute details of the conversation and the nuances of the diplomatic utterances, makes for interesting reading. Remarks by Narendra Modi, “Let us crush the hype and promote people-to-people contact,” capture the mood of the moment very well. According to the author, the momentum of such initiatives was, however, lost due to entrenched positions taken by the hawkish lobbies in both countries and the political instability in Pakistan.

As Foreign Secretary, the author highlights the Pakistan-USA relations as well as the civil-military relations in Pakistan. He cites differences on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the Indian policy, as irritants between civilian and military leadership which he tried to resolve in his capacity as a Foreign Secretary. The US concerns about nuclear restraint issues and the Haqqani Network raised through Peter Lavoy, the US Director of NSC during Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s visit to the USA, are cited as a few examples where the relations came under strain but were retrieved through deft diplomacy.

The author comes across as a person setting great stores by human relations and an equal tolerance of human foibles. He serves up a very palatable recipe of life lessons, filial ties, friendly bonds, and abiding pride in old school ties forged in the smithy of PAF Cadet College life. His most inspiring narrative is his struggle as a cancer survivor and the never say die spirit exhibited while defeating it. He speaks feelingly of the human bondage while describing his travails as a patient staring death in the face. His family’s support and his own will

Book Review

power pulled him back from the edge of the precipice, as he internalized another life lesson i.e., “the human experience is a game of wrestling with life’s unexpected circumstances and finding harmony in accepting fate as it comes.”

Diplomatic Footprints is a book that inspires as well as educates and can be useful as a reference book on diplomacy, foreign policy, and security studies.